United Nations A/58/PV.45

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

45th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 28 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 55, 57, 58 and 59 (*continued*)

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/786, A/58/175, A/58/351, A/58/382 and A/58/395 and Corr.1)

Mr. Ngo Duc Thang (Viet Nam): My delegation wishes to join previous speakers in commending the Secretary-General for his important and comprehensive reports on revitalization of the work of the General Assembly and strengthening of the United Nations system. We highly appreciate the practice of considering those two agenda items in this joint plenary debate. We particularly welcome the President's non-paper on the same subjects, presented at the open-ended consultations held on 17 October. We believe that those documents can serve as a good basis for today's discussion. My delegation would also like to support the statements made by the representative of Algeria, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Working Group on Reform of the United Nations and Revitalization of the General Assembly, and by the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

My delegation has always attached great importance to the ongoing reform process aimed at further strengthening the United Nations and revitalizing the work of the General Assembly. In that spirit, we wish to express our firm support for the Secretary-General's call for radical reform, made at the opening of the general debate, on 23 October. We thank him for his tireless efforts devoted to that difficult task. We believe that many measures and proposals contained in documents A/58/395 and A/58/351 deserve our careful consideration and endorsement. We wish also to commend President Hunte for his strong commitment in taking the lead in pursuing efforts to advance the process of further revitalization of the work and agenda of the General Assembly. My delegation assures the Assembly of its consistent support and full cooperation in that regard.

However, we believe that the United Nations should undertake more effective and practical efforts to earn the confidence and meet the expectations of nations. That requires a stronger and more democratized United Nations and a Security Council with better representation of developing countries and of countries that have made positive contributions to our common objectives. We are also of the view that the current reform efforts within the Organization must

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

03-58293 (E)

focus first and foremost on enhancing the General Assembly's authority and role as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative body of the United Nations, in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

We should like to express our serious concern over the fact that the central role of the General Assembly has been gradually eroding, with its legitimacy being questioned owing to the preference of some to work through the Security Council. We all believe that that situation should be resolved. We welcome all measures aimed at addressing the problem of the General Assembly's relative marginalization, while strengthening the cooperation and effective relationships between the Assembly and other principal organs — particularly the Security Council. The forum of 191 Member States should be the highest authority of the United Nations and live up to the expectations of the world's people in responding to all important and urgent global issues. To that end, we hope that this discussion can help to achieve a breakthrough in our efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the most important organ of the United Nations.

My delegation is of the view that enhancement of the General Assembly cannot be complete unless we rationalize its agenda and improve its working methods. Revitalization has been on the Assembly's agenda since 1991 and has been strengthened by a series of resolutions that have brought about remarkable achievements with regard to reform of the General Assembly and of the Organization as a whole. The Assembly's agenda is now more focused on its substantive work, since many of its items have been regrouped by subject or are considered on a biennial or triennial basis.

However, there is still room for improvement. The president is encouraged to work with the chairs of the Main Committees to consider assigning more items to those Committees in order to preserve General Assembly plenary meetings as a forum for high-level policy statements and for considering agenda items of special political importance and/or urgency. We welcome Assembly President Hunte's initiative in changing the format of his monthly encounters with the chairs of the Main Committees and the Secretariat to ensure a more meaningful exchange of information. In that regard, we fully support the enhancement of the president's role and office to enable them to conduct the business of the General Assembly more effectively.

My delegation would like to express its view the suggestions made at the informal consultations support the current practice of reserving two weeks the general debate, during which leaders of Mer States present their statements on global issues, and combining of items that concern more than Committee in a joint debate. We also support the N Working Group's proposal that the General Asser agenda should be reviewed periodically to consider possibility of deleting any item on which no resolu or decision has been adopted for a certain perio time. Assembly resolutions should be short focused, with particular attention given to implementation. In that regard, we comm President Hunte for the framework of actions conta in his non-paper, and we welcome all initiatives proposals made by other delegations to improve General Assembly's capacity to respond effectivel the challenges of the twenty-first century.

We share the view of the Secretary-Gen expressed in his report contained in docu A/58/395, that a strategic framework should developed to set a direction for the Organizat programmes and budgetary planning so as to ensu strategic connection between programmes and reso allocation. We believe that the formulation of su strategic framework could be very important fo effective shift towards a results-based approach. biennial programme plan should be a policy instru to translate the Organization's legislative mandates programmes. The budget outline should be detailed, with additional information on programm and resource changes.

The Secretary-General's proposal for improved and renamed medium-term plan, comb with an interlinked and expanded budget outline, not only reduce the time needed for their review also ensure an appropriate level of resources allocated to each programme. In order to achieve the objectives and goals set out in the medium plan, we need to strengthen the system of monit and evaluation, as well as enhance the role o Committee for Programme and Coordination. The of that system is self-monitoring and evaluatio each programme manager, which is crucial fo better implementation of the programmes. As a r the Secretariat would report more frequentl Member States on programme performance evaluation. Member States would then be ab

provide them with timely policy guidance for future plans, including any necessary adjustment of resource needs, while considering the reports.

My delegation greatly appreciates the Secretary-General's efforts to develop an implementation plan to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations system in developing countries. We support his intention to strengthen the resident coordinator system and to coordinate all United Nations activities at the country level, as expressed in part VII of his report in document A/58/351. We believe that the annual global resident representative meetings will soon come up with new initiatives to make more efficient use of the scarce United Nations resources allocated for the developing countries. We are looking forward to this implementation being discussed in 2004 at the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development.

In conclusion, my delegation hopes that our deliberations will result in constructive contributions that make the United Nations a stronger and more effective international body. In this sprit, my delegation wishes to welcome the panel of eminent personalities appointed by the Secretary-General to examine the current challenges and make recommendations on a broad-based organizational reform. We fully believe that the panel's recommendations, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, as well as those of the Non-Aligned Movement working group on the reform of the United Nations and the revitalization of the General Assembly, will provide sound and objective inputs for the constructive and efficient reform of the Organization.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): Among the suggestions put forward with regard to the revitalization of the General Assembly is that we should avoid repetitive speeches. I will not, therefore, repeat the detailed comments of the Italian presidency of the European Union. France fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the Union.

I would simply like briefly to express France's support for greater balance among the various organs of the United Nations. First, the General Assembly, a universal organ, needs to reassert its position and its authority in its own domain. We believe that it would be damaging to the United Nations system if we failed to fully count on one of its key pillars. Secondly, I would like to refer to the resolute and encouraging action of President Hunte, who can count on the support of the French delegation in his efforts to revitalize the General Assembly.

Change is evident in all areas this year. The need for change is now appreciated by everyone. The time has come for us all to commit ourselves and to underscore the importance we attach to the General Assembly. I have no doubt that the outside world is again taking note of what is happening in the Assembly.

Mr. Nambiar (India): My delegation is pleased to participate in this debate. We thank the Secretary-General for the various reports presented under the agenda items under consideration. We also express our appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Fréchette, for her introductory statement yesterday.

The broader issues outlining the position of the non-aligned countries were expressed yesterday by Algeria, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by Morocco, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77. Their statements have my delegation's support.

We congratulate the President of the Assembly on his personal commitment to the process of revitalizing the General Assembly. In the few weeks during which he has presided over the General Assembly, he has demonstrated, by personal example, his determination to restore the prestige and authority of the General Assembly. We wish him every success in this endeavour and assure him of the fullest cooperation of the Indian delegation.

My delegation has maintained that in reform and revitalization we cannot expect to achieve remarkable results overnight. There are no magic solutions. Where we are called upon to deal with sensitive political questions and issues perceived by Member States as impinging on their core national interests, change will necessarily be slow and measured. We need to build on areas of agreement step by step, block by block. A useful beginning can be made by a quick review of the revitalization exercise undertaken so far and of the state of implementation or non-implementation of the resolutions already adopted.

India's broad political support for the reform process is premised on the objective of enhancing the

Organization's effectiveness to make it more responsive to the priorities of Member States, particularly for the developing countries, which constitute the vast majority of its membership.

Our support for the Secretary-General's initiative of setting up a high-level panel of eminent personalities to report on the threats and challenges faced by the United Nations and the changes necessary in its institutions and processes is also premised on the same objective. We hope the intergovernmental consideration of the report and its recommendations will provide us an opportunity to take a holistic view of the entire process, so that reforms in different parts of the United Nations system may move in the same direction and prove enduring in the long run.

The litmus test of any reform exercise would be whether it increases the Organization's ability to assist the developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other targets agreed upon at the major United Nations conferences and summits. The United Nations will be strengthened if and when it contributes effectively to the efforts of the developing countries in the implementation of those outcomes. This must also involve monitoring the extent to which developed countries are demonstrating shared responsibility by fulfilling their commitments and obligations, especially in reaching the agreed target of official development assistance through provision of additional financial resources, transfer of technologies, debt relief, market access and movement towards a greater voice for the developing countries in international, monetary and trade institutions. The other major test of the reform exercise will be greater effectiveness in the United Nations ability to deal with the "global bads", as it were: international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction — including the issue of nuclear disarmament — and transnational organized crime, including the trafficking in narcotic drugs, humans and arms.

In attempting to revitalize the work of the General Assembly, we must underline first of all the question of its core competence. The General Assembly is meant to be the highest body in the Organization to deliberate and review policy. It is not expected to function as an executive or judiciary body. As its presiding officer, the President must be able to enhance the effective performance of this function in the interest of the broad membership of the Assembly. In this era of cross-cutting concerns, we must guard against an overly zealous approach in which this body would proceed intrusively into areas which are essentially the core competence of other bodies in the United Nations system, even as we avoid a surrender of the General Assembly's remit to other bodies, including the Security Council or the Secretariat.

In practical terms, while the interactions between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have given rise to few difficulties, the relationship between the Assembly and the Security Council does occasionally give rise to anomalies in terms of issues taken up for consideration and their treatment. Also, the relative roles of the presiding officers of the two organs need clarification. We need to remember that the President of the General Assembly does not have the authority to represent the collective opinion of the General Assembly except when he is explicitly authorized to do so by the Assembly itself. The United Nations Charter does not confer any authority on the President in substantive matters.

While saying this, there is no denying the need for the Office of the President to be strengthened for the effective and orderly conduct of the Assembly's business. Without waiting for a lengthy and time-consuming exercise, we could move rapidly in several areas. For example, the Office of the President could easily be strengthened by the provision of a small number of additional posts. The implementation of this measure should not depend on the relative alacrity of the Secretariat's response to this as compared to other more attractive demands upon it.

Similarly, the Assembly needs to undertake a thorough review, not only of the agenda and programme of work for plenary meetings and of the Main Committees, but also of their methods of work, with a view to improving them and enhancing their effectiveness. The General Committee or an equivalent body could be entrusted with functions similar to those of the bureau of a Main Committee.

If there were consensus on reforming the agenda, Member States would be willing to explore ways in which discussions could be organized around particular themes and sub-themes in the work of the Main Committees. Similarly, Member States would be open to the idea of designating a theme for the general debate in plenary meeting, so long as they are in a position to address issues of concern to them.

There has been some talk of rationalizing the number, length and language of resolutions of the General Assembly. Since the General Assembly is the principal deliberative organ and fills a policy-making function, it is inevitable that some of its resolutions will contain declaratory language. However, when it comes to resolutions concerning the implementation of programmes of action or operational activities, it should be possible, in our view, to rationalize the language of resolutions and to simplify them so that the focus is on their operational content. This would also help in overseeing and reviewing implementation of the resolutions.

Another area that lends itself to early examination and agreement is that of the strict observance of the rules of procedure. The Main Committees seem to have developed work cultures of their own and often display scant respect for the established rules of procedure. This is not conscionable, and it is important that we look into this area more closely. At the same time, we need to be open to the idea of reviewing the rules of procedure and adapting them to modern times. To illustrate this point, the General Assembly would save valuable time and resources if we were to decide that delegations were free to circulate a longer version of their statements but would read only, say, an executive summary, so long as they were assured that the longer version would go into the record. However, so long as the provisional verbatim records of the General Assembly contain only the words that are actually spoken, that will not be possible.

There is often talk of the need to make General Assembly proceedings more interesting and attractive. This goal is pursued through the organizing of several high-profile parallel events, such as interactive dialogues, panel discussions and seminars. One of the stated objectives of this exercise is to enhance interaction with civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and the private sector. While there is nothing intrinsically objectionable in this idea — and in fact it might be useful — we wish to underscore the intergovernmental character of the Organization. Any effort to enhance interaction with civil society should be done in a manner that increases the quality of intergovernmental decision-making.

The Secretariat deserves our praise for recommending the elimination of several reports, meetings and other activities of marginal utility. Many of the reports for the fifty-eighth session were received well within the prescribed limit. We are grateful for this.

There are several other areas that need to be explored in terms of reducing the number of meetings and reports, reducing the number of resolutions and having sunset provisions for both new mandates and existing activities. Without doubt, these will require further discussion. We would just like to underline that reducing the volume of work and managing time and resources efficiently and effectively is a task not only for the Secretariat but also for Member States. A degree of self-discipline has to be exercised by Member States before they rush forward with new initiatives and resolutions every year.

The Secretary-General has outlined in document A/58/351 some of the measures being undertaken in his report on the status of implementation of actions in response to General Assembly resolution 57/300.

We trust that the consultations being held by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will encompass not only the members of the Commission on Human Rights but non-members of the Commission as well. We would emphasize the need for the process to be inclusive so that no impression is given of agreeing on matters in exclusive groupings. We hope the exercise will reduce the burden of reporting requirements, particularly on the developing countries. We would be open to considering guidelines for an expanded core document, so long as it is understood that such a document would reduce the reporting burden, address the issue of backlog, avoid the repetition of details and obviate the need for replicating the contents of the core document in individual reports to treaty bodies, or effectively expand the obligations of States parties to the core covenants. We call for more consultations with Member States on the matter.

The information on improving the system of special procedures provided in the report of the Secretary-General raises several points of concern. It is not clear to us whether the consultations initiated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on improving the special procedures mechanisms are inclusive and wide-ranging. We believe that the emphasis should be on greater coordination, avoiding duplication and overlapping, and checking the tendency of special procedures

mandate holders to exceed their mandates, which seems to be happening rather too frequently.

We do not favour the idea of joint initiatives, including joint urgent appeals, statements, press releases and communications, by special procedures mandate holders. In our view, the special procedures mandates are each distinct and different. We also do not see the need for a feasibility study for enhancing the "dissemination" of findings and recommendations of special procedures mandate holders. We believe such dissemination should be in the form of reports to the Commission on Human Rights. After all, the mandate holders are appointees of the Commission. Additionally, we do not believe that any useful purpose is served by interaction between special procedures mechanisms and the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council.

We call on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to fully implement the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services following their management review. In our view, those recommendations are comprehensive and focused, and merit full and effective implementation. Any expansion in the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights must be commensurate with its budgetary resources, and not based on extrabudgetary funding.

We note the ongoing work on the simplification and harmonization of programming tools and the strengthening of the resident coordinator system and we hope that those efforts will result in a reduction of transaction costs for developing countries and will enhance country ownership. It is important that specific proposals based on the policy guidelines set forth in General Assembly resolution 57/300 be submitted to the executive boards of the funds and programmes for approval.

The report of the Secretary-General sets out the recommendations of the Secretariat's joint Working Group on Transition Issues, which was charged with reviewing a range of United Nations responses in post-conflict situations. The Group recommended the facilitation of links among the political, peacekeeping and operational wings of the United Nations in order to address the variance in mandates for different United Nations offices at a given location. The underlying premise seems to be that a United Nations response cannot be effective if it is fragmented and that, therefore, those dealing with humanitarian assistance, those dealing with security, those dealing with human rights and those dealing with development should deliver an integrated response.

As we have reiterated on a number of occasions, there are several risks associated with such an approach. There is a predisposition in some quarters to see transition issues as opportunities to fundamentally transform the social mores, recast the economic priorities and influence the political dynamics of post-conflict societies. We must sound a note of caution here. If the United Nations collaborates in such efforts it could jeopardize its status as a trusted partner of developing countries. It is most important that the United Nations respect the differences in its roles in peacekeeping, in the protection and promotion of human rights, in fostering economic and social development, and in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The delivery or coordination of assistance needs to be done in a manner that clearly conforms to the principles of development and humanitarian assistance that have been clearly established by the United Nations.

During its current session, the General Assembly will deliberate far-reaching reform of the planning and budgetary process. There is widespread recognition that these processes can be made more effective and efficient, with added value for both Member States and the Secretariat. While it is important to retain the intergovernmental nature of these processes, we need at the same time to ensure that intergovernmental review is more effective and relevant and that it provides clearer guidance to the Secretariat. This is a matter of crucial importance. This is a matter of urgency, but, given the long-term implications of such an exercise for the Organization, we must avoid hasty or half-cooked conclusions.

Those are some preliminary views of India on the cluster of issues under debate today. We took forward to working with other delegations in the upcoming discussions and consultations under these items.

Mr. Kim Sam-hoon (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the strong commitment that President Hunte has demonstrated to the reform of our Organization. My delegation is encouraged by his dedication to this issue and hopes that it will bring about real reform this year. While the

Republic of Korea strongly supports the President's leadership in guiding overall United Nations reform, today I would like to focus on the reform of the General Assembly itself.

After 10 years of discussing the issue of General Assembly reform in this forum, my delegation cannot help but express its frustration with the slow progress that has been made thus far. Each year we have spoken on this issue, and yet we are unsure to what extent this perennial debate has enhanced the authority of the Assembly. We share the concern regarding the marginalization of the General Assembly. Before putting forward our suggestions on what should be done to resolve this problem, however, allow me to briefly discuss why we believe it has occurred.

First of all, because of the nature of the decisions made by the Security Council and the high visibility of its work, the centre of gravity of the United Nations has been progressively shifting towards the Council since the end of the cold war. In recent years, the Security Council has expanded the scope of its work beyond direct conflict management to include related matters such as the rule of law, justice and gender issues in the context of peacekeeping. It is notable as well that the Security Council virtually has the power to set the level of the peacekeeping budget, which is far greater than that of the United Nations regular budget. Not even the key financial contributors outside of the Security Council are consulted when new peacekeeping operations are created or existing ones expanded. Thus, some would argue that the power left to the General Assembly does not extend far beyond its rights with respect to the regular budget and elections to major United Nations organs, including the non-permanent members of the Security Council.

Second, the increase in the number of Member States has led to a greater divergence of interest and views, divisiveness and lack of unity in the General Assembly. This is a natural corollary of the growth in membership. Clearly, the lowest common denominator among the present 191 Member States is far lower than it was among the 51 Member States that existed at the time of the creation of the United Nations.

On issues of United Nations reform, all 191 Member States stand in agreement that the Organization must be revitalized and strengthened. Unfortunately, that consensus has been met with 191 different positions on how this reform should be carried out. It has become extremely difficult to formulate reform that will accommodate all the individual desires of all Member States. When Member States put their parochial interests above the collective common good of the Organization, the process of General Assembly reform cannot move forward. Meanwhile, there are too many sacred cows standing in the way of General Assembly reform. However, if we do not move forward with reform, the Organization's integrity, authority and relevance to the global order will suffer.

Thirdly, year in and year out too many General Assembly resolutions are adopted, too few of which are remembered, cared about or heeded. Many of them do not differ in substance from previous resolutions. As they are merely declaratory in nature and are not legally binding, they carry little weight. The number of agenda items never stops growing. As a result, we notice a tendency for the domestic issues of Member States to be brought before the General Assembly. Despite their dubious relevance, it is difficult for the other Member States not to support these resolutions, so long as they do no direct harm. However, the adoption of irrelevant resolutions does cumulative harm to the credibility of the General Assembly. The Assembly has expanded its scope of work to include even the commemoration of a national event. While these issues may be important for specific Member States, we must admit that they obscure the pressing global issues of concern to us all.

All these factors have combined to result in the weakening of the authority and relevance of the General Assembly. Although there are inherent constraints stemming from the Charter that reform cannot overcome, there is still much that we, as Member States, can do to revitalize and strengthen the role of the General Assembly.

First, we share the view that the Assembly should focus on issues in which the United Nations can make a difference in the world and which the Governments and peoples we serve will care about and take note of. More of the General Assembly's time and resources must be allocated to in-depth discussions on the most pressing global issues of public interest. In that regard, we support the idea of organizing the General Assembly agenda around a number of thematic issues. Moreover, certain agenda items should be considered biannually or triannually, while the obsolete ones should be deleted altogether. In that context, we

support the idea of avoiding repetition of the same resolutions. We must also exert greater effort to consolidate redundant issues and to re-evaluate issues that no longer serve their original purpose. In that regard, the Republic of Korea welcomes the initiative of the President on the regrouping or clustering of agenda items and looks forward to further progress to that end.

Secondly, with respect to the organization of meetings, we support the idea of scheduling meetings throughout the year so that we can make the best use of the resources available to Missions and to the Secretariat. We see no compelling reason why all Committee sessions should begin at the same time or why meetings should be concentrated in one season. If meetings were spread throughout the year, Member States could devote more attention to each agenda item.

Thirdly, the Republic of Korea agrees that there is a need to strengthen the Office of the President of the General Assembly in order to enhance the authority and the role of the Assembly. In that regard, we lend our support to the idea of using the General Committee as a bureau for the presidency. In the light of our own experience of holding the presidency of the General Assembly in 2001, we believe the Office of the President would benefit from an increased number of permanent staff members drawn from the Secretariat. In that connection, we underline the importance of the Secretary-General's support for the Office of the President.

Fourthly, we agree that there is a need to restructure and streamline the outdated roles of the organs so that the General Assembly can deal with salient global issues. In that context, the Republic of Korea pledges its unswerving support for United Nations reform aimed at promoting sound administration of the Organization's resources, transparency, a culture of accountability and improved programme performance to meet the challenges of our time.

Fifthly, regarding the modalities of reform, comprehensive holistic approaches have been in fashion for quite some time now at the United Nations. Nevertheless, there may be cases in which a piecemeal approach could prove more practical than a holistic approach. Thus, we see merit in employing an incremental approach in the context of attaining a holistic perspective.

Sixthly, we must make efforts to put the collective interests of the global community above our parochial interests. The United Nations was created to be greater than the sum of its parts. The lowest common denominator among 191 Member States with different philosophies and interests is far too low to effect real change. If we allow the reform process to move forward at the speed of those who are the least willing to move, little can be achieved. We should therefore not let the lowest common denominator dictate the speed and scope of reform. Real change within the United Nations will not happen without some degree of sacrifice from the general membership. When put in a broader context, small yet meaningful concessions from Member States will ultimately lead to tangible benefits for the entire international community.

Finally, my delegation wishes to stress that United Nations reform should be a continuous and action-oriented process. The United Nations, as a living organism, must constantly evolve and adapt in a timely manner to changing circumstances and to the needs of the times. When it fails to meet this challenge, it falls into benign irrelevance. Implementing reform is the only way to enable the Organization to overcome the new and emerging challenges that our dynamic world continues to pose.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The Secretary-General has succinctly presented a most comprehensive report on strengthening the United Nations (A/58/351). It demonstrates his clear vision and consistent thoughts on bringing it to fruition. He is deserving of our most sincere thanks. But I would be remiss were I not to make very early reference to the commendable commitment and bold initiatives of the President of the General Assembly to that end. These have accorded a positive impetus to the revitalization process. His non-paper provides an excellent basis for our formal and informal deliberations.

I should also point out that we associate ourselves with the views of the representative of Algeria, Ambassador Abdallah Baali, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Ambassador Mohamed Bennouna of Morocco, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Their leadership role in this regard is praiseworthy.

The President took the Chair.

Bangladesh is a country which is in the midst of a tremendous societal transformation. Through a mix of appropriate macroeconomic policies, judicious use of external support, innovative home-grown ideas, commitment to democracy and pluralism and ardent dedication to gender justice and women's empowerment, peace and development have emerged as the twin supreme objectives of our nation. We see the United Nations as also embodying these aspirations and complementing our own efforts and those of others in comparable milieux.

We see the need for better equipping this institution, which represents the urges of humanity. We must, working together, enhance its capacity to realize its goals. Hence, we have consistently supported the reform efforts that we believe aim at doing just that. We believe that reform should be a continuing process. It should involve enhancing the efficiency of the Secretariat. It should also address itself to such intergovernmental organs as the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Changes sought must be aimed at the general good. They must not bend to the will of the more powerful. They must respond to complex global challenges posed in the areas of peace, security and development. Their purpose must be to contribute to reaffirming the United Nations as the central, universal, multilateral institution of the twenty-first century.

At the heart of the reform exercise must lie the desire to achieve all the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration as well as the implementation of all of the action plans emanating from the great conferences of the 1990s. While combating the "hard" terror brought on by irrational thought and action, the Organization should also be adequately empowered to root out the "soft" terrors of hunger, disease, privation and environmental degradation. While leading and inspiring the intellectual quest for the best means to advance human welfare, it must also function as the locator, collator and transmitter of indigenously evolved best practices. Reforms must not perpetuate current imbalances, nor must they respond only to the political, economic and military realities of a given point in time, for they are only transitory. Revitalization of the intergovernmental processes and institutions should not be seen in a mutually exclusive and compartmentalized manner, but in a mutually reinforcing and holistic way.

The Secretary-General's decision in this context to set up a panel of eminent personalities is most welcome. Those selected should be representative of the broadest spectrum of intellectual diversity as well as of equitable geographical distribution. It is important to ensure that they work free of external interference and in tandem with the intergovernmental process. They must also be able to address the problem without any ideological bias or preconceived a priori notions that would continue to be held even in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary.

We are heartened to note that the Secretary-General has accorded high priority to the Millennium Development Goals and to the medium-term plan in proposing a programme budget for 2004-2005. This is in line with what the General Assembly recommended last year. We are pleased with the cultural shift in presenting the budget in a results-based format. We commend the proposals for a shorter and more strategic medium-term plan and for refocusing the role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination to monitor programme performance and evaluation. My delegation will examine these proposals with an open mind in the appropriate intergovernmental forum. We are confident that the Organization would benefit from a coherent approach to further rationalization of structures, optimal utilization of resources, elimination of duplication, reinforcement of coordination and introduction of benchmarks for monitoring and performance evaluation.

Economic and social development is the area to which my delegation attaches the highest importance. We support the enhancement of the effectiveness of the field presence of the United Nations in developing countries. The proposed modalities, such as strengthening the United Nations resident coordinator system, simplification and harmonization of development programmes, improving accountability, joint programming and evaluation reporting are noteworthy. The end result of these reform efforts must ensure better service delivery at the country level. National development needs and priorities should constitute the basis of these improved operational activities.

The establishment of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa should provide increased support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). As the Chair of the Second Committee this year, I would recommend and hope that the proposed

measures also contribute to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 in their development cooperation programmes. An overwhelming number of least developed countries are in Africa, a continent that confronts manifold structural impediments to development. Those barriers must be brought down. Africa has suffered much and long. The world now owes it to Africa to relieve its pain.

The new budget realignment to strengthen the capacity of the Economic and Social Council towards implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the Monterrey and Johannesburg decisions is a timely initiative. We look forward to the opportunity to assess the follow-up mechanisms to the Monterrey Consensus during the intergovernmental discussions in 2004. We strongly support the dialogue process established among the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Human rights is an area of high priority for Bangladesh. We believe development can only take place against a social matrix where values of human rights enjoy a premium. Many of the institutional reforms merit our commendation. I speak particularly, of those aimed at strengthening the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, supporting national capacity-building of strong human rights institutions, rationalizing reporting obligations to treaty bodies and improving the special procedures system. When the High Commissioner prepares his report next year, we would expect that Member States would be appropriately consulted.

We endorse the Secretary-General's approach towards evolving closer collaboration with civil society and the private sector. Bangladesh, as all are aware, has a vibrant civil society and a burgeoning private sector. Both are engaged in our country with the positive changes under way in our own society. While we look forward to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society, we continue to advocate that capacity-building for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the Monterrey Consensus and for globalization should receive high priority in the role to be played by both the sectors. Many of the pragmatic recommendations that are emanating from the interactions between the Second Committee and civil society this year merit consideration in the work of the Panel. We are hopeful that the measures undertaken involving new techniques and technologies will improve the dissemination of public information, archives and documentation and also will make the voice of the United Nations heard better, and its relevance understood more.

As Chair of the Committee on Information this year, I look forward to working closely with the Department of Public Information and Member States on a systematic evaluation of the impact of all the good measures undertaken to strengthen a culture of communications in the Organization. Reallocation of resources saved from regional hubbing in Western Europe to strengthening United Nations information centres in developing countries and to promoting multilingualism would be of special interest to developing countries.

Before I conclude, let me say a word on the buzz-word in the corridors: revitalization of the General Assembly. We are confident that many of the creative and pragmatic ideas that emanated from the past few years of work and from our recent informals with you, Mr. President, will be sharpened and honed through further consultations. It is too early to comment on the specifics. However, the philosophy of the revitalization process should first be agreed upon. The two clusters — one on improving the working methods and the other on restoring and enhancing the authority and powers of the General Assembly, as envisaged in the Charter — should progress simultaneously.

Starting immediately with the small and achievable could be a practical strategy. Proper evaluation of progress would bring greater success. Demonstration of strong political will in placing collective interest before national interest, to prevent further marginalization and erosion of the General Assembly vis-à-vis the Security Council, should receive special focus. Strengthening the Office and role of the President of the General Assembly and its public outreach should be a valid and achievable starting point.

The Committees are key to the function of the General Assembly. Their revitalization must not be seen as separate from that of the Assembly. Reform and revitalization, then, must be a continuous, holistic and seamless process, aiming at expanding the wherewithal of the United Nations and all its organs to serve

humanity. Because this institution represents some of the noblest motives of humankind, it deserves the best that our creativity and wisdom can press into its service. The United Nations and humanity will find the results mutually rewarding.

Mr. Gatan (Philippines): The Philippines stands in solidarity with the views of the Group of 77 and of the Non- Aligned Movement on the cluster of four important agenda items relating to United Nations reform.

My delegation is pleased to note that the Office of the President of the General Assembly has demonstrated renewed interest in the subject of our current joint debate. We therefore commend you, Mr. President, for the number of initiatives you have already launched that are aimed at the efficient and effective management of the current and future sessions of the General Assembly.

Mr. President, in response to the call you made in your informal note for delegations to contribute constructively to this joint debate by proposing specific and concrete courses of action on both the form and substance of the work of the General Assembly, my delegation will refrain from dwelling on generalizations.

While our specific recommendations are directed towards the General Assembly in relation to agenda item 55 some may find application in the other clustered agenda items.

With regard to procedural matters, my delegation wishes, as of now, to submit only three proposals.

First, we propose that regional or group statements should take precedence over national statements in their inscription for the general debate. Delegations aligning themselves with the views presented by their respective regions or groups should try to refrain from delivering statements for the purpose of reiterating views already contained in their group statements. However, delegations which hold views not espoused in their regional or group statements may deliver brief national statements.

Regional or group statements should be comprehensive in written form for distribution, but their oral presentation has to be shortened, through either the presentation of an abstract or the highlighting of salient points only.

Secondly, we propose that not only should related agenda items be clustered, but also that the resolutions arising from them should likewise be clustered. Clustering, of course, generates a holistic consideration of interrelated issues, avoids duplication and thus conserves resources. More importantly, it allows more time for both interactive discussions and consideration of the President's conclusions on each cluster of agenda items — the subject of our next recommendation.

Thirdly, we propose that more time be given to an interactive discussion of issues considered during the general debate or of thematic issues. In this regard, it is further recommended that, in order to avoid an unwieldy exchange of views by all 191 States Members of the United Nations, the interactive discussion be carried out mainly by the spokesmen for groups, spiced with the participation of representatives of selected sectors of civil society. The President would then issue his own assessments or conclusions on the outcome of both the general debate and the interactive discussions, which may also serve as the basis for the formulation of resolutions or decisions of the General Assembly.

These three modest proposals for procedural change could go a long way towards injecting life into the work of the General Assembly, by giving more relevance to the outcome of discussions in the form of resolutions and decisions and by addressing the heart of universal or global concerns rather than marginal concerns.

With regard to substance, revitalization or reform may be elusive if we do not identify the perennial problems confronting the United Nations.

In terms of gravity, the foremost problem is the general awareness that United Nations resolutions, with the exception of those adopted by the Security Council, are not binding on Member States. The second problem is also the awareness that a great number of United Nations bodies are no longer representative of the general membership — a situation that can erode the interest of many Member States. The third is the apparent lack of strong coordination among the three important organs of the United Nations, namely the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

With regard to the first problem, my delegation proposes that an effective monitoring system be installed. For example, the monitoring of the

implementation of General Assembly resolutions should be delegated, whenever possible, to competent bodies such as the regional commissions. Monitoring should be a continuing process whose results should be reported back to the General Assembly.

On the second problem, my delegation proposes a review by, perhaps, a working group on the membership of important United Nations bodies, starting with the Economic and Social Council, with a view to rationalizing membership in relation to the number of countries represented or to group representation.

On the third problem, we propose intersessional bilateral consultative meetings between the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to coordinate their respective work and to assess the outcome of coordination. There should likewise be consultative meetings between the Presidents of the General Assembly and of the Security Council, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter, particularly Articles 10, 11 and 24.

For more than 10 years, the General Assembly has been seized with the issue of revitalization and reform. Yet the measures adopted so far have been modest in contrast to the mounting problems of both macro and micromanagement. My delegation is confident that under your stewardship of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, we will be able to register significant improvements in both the form and the substance of our multilateral work.

My delegation proposes that the President once again convene an informal working group to look into all the submissions presented during this joint debate to coming up with an agreed improved course of action to take effect at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Libyan delegation expresses its satisfaction at the importance attached to the reform of the United Nations and the rationalization of the role of the General Assembly. My delegation expresses its appreciation to you, Sir, for your initiative to study methods of improving the work of the General Assembly and your determination to pursue this process within the framework of strengthening the Assembly's role so that it can function more effectively.

We pay tribute to the Secretary-General for the reforms and for the initiative that he presented at the start of this session, namely the creation of a panel of eminent persons to study the reform of the United Nations. The delegation of Algeria spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the delegation of Morocco spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We support their statements and wish to add a few comments.

In evaluating the progress made to date on the rationalization of the General Assembly, Libya considers it a step in the right direction that the President and Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and the Chairmen of the Main Committees are elected three months before the General Assembly session begins. However, we believe that this is merely a procedural change, not a goal. We need measures focussing on substantial issues in order to give real meaning to the revitalization of the Assembly. We must reactivate the Assembly's role so that it can be the responsible body to which the subsidiary organs, including the Security Council, must be accountable. It must carry out its work as mandated by the Charter and be faithful to its principles, working in cooperation with other bodies for the maintenance of international peace and security. Moreover we think that the General Assembly should meet whenever a crisis that threatens international peace arises, study the crisis and then transmit its recommendations for study by the Security Council.

My delegation understands the importance of encouraging Member States, as well as their national institutions and civil societies, to publish widely the decisions and recommendations of the General Assembly. That would solve the dilemma that concerns us: the inability to implement the resolutions adopted by this body. We think the most effective measure in this respect would be to create a mechanism of the General Assembly that would follow up on implementation of its decisions and recommendations and highlight successes and failures and the means of remedying them. Otherwise, we fear that some will have the impression that this body is simply a place where people and countries shed tears and make complaints over resolutions that remain dead letters — as the Secretary-General has said, resolutions of no importance outside the Assembly Hall.

Member States are keen to be represented at the highest level during the general debate of each session

of the General Assembly. The presence of heads of State and Government during this and past sessions demonstrates the great importance that Member States attach to the Assembly as the principal forum for deliberation and policy-making. However, we feel that this interest starts to wane after the first two weeks of the session. Certain items on the agenda have been addressed by speakers who find themselves practically alone in the Hall — a small handful of delegates attend simply as a matter of courtesy. My delegation thinks that we should reflect on how to make agenda items more attractive, for example by encouraging interactive debate rather than listening to previously prepared statements. We should study the proposal on issues of special concern and ensure balance in the items of the agenda.

The delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya expresses its satisfaction at the practice of grouping certain agenda items for discussion every two years. We were among the first to act on that measure. We think that the item under consideration is a case in point. We are strongly opposed to what some are doing, namely deleting certain items on the agenda that have not been debated by the General Assembly for years. We think that those resolutions and decisions should continue to be debated and that debate on those items or the lack thereof should not be made the sole criterion for such a decision. The Libyan delegation supports a reconsideration of the annual decisions of the General Assembly. We believe that items of a similar nature should be grouped together. We support the proposal aimed at reducing the number of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

With respect to the proposal to consider extending the schedule of the General Assembly session over the entire calendar year instead of limiting it to the period from September to December, we believe it is an original idea. The Fifth Committee provides an example; it convenes several time throughout the year in order to complete its consideration of the items that could not be heard during its principal segment. The Libyan delegation considers this proposal to be positive, particularly for small delegations that could then participate more intensively. We think that this proposal deserves serious study.

In that context, we ask the following questions. First, will the meetings of the Main Committees take place several times a year? If so, when will Member States be informed as to which items are to be studied in each segment, in particular those items that require experts to come from participating capitals. Secondly, if the General Assembly and the Committees hold meetings on a continual basis, what will be the length of each committee meeting, and who decides that? Thirdly, will the meetings of the Main Committees take place continually throughout the year, and will there be simultaneous meetings of more than one Main Committee?

We have listened with interest to the debate and proposals for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. The Libyan delegation thinks that these ideas require thorough study and examination. That should be done in consultation with the General Assembly as a whole, as was the case on 17 October. In that context, we support the proposal to designate coordinators for consultations and for the study of the proposals and for preparing specific proposals to be considered by the General Assembly.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Russia welcomes the report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" on the implementation of actions (A/57/786). We took note of the special attention paid by the Secretary-General to the issue of United Nations reform and improvement of its executive mechanisms. We wish to note that the Secretary-General clearly understands the substance and the objectives of reforms and that they are implemented with high administrative efficiency.

Russia supports the concept of strengthening coordination within the United Nations system and the interfunctioning of its key elements. We believe that efforts in this direction should be focused on formulating a joint response by the international community to new challenges and threats and on joint efforts of Member States to strengthen international security in all its dimensions.

As far as the report is concerned, we regard it as a well-balanced document that objectively reflects the active process of transformation in various areas of United Nations activity, in accordance with the well known resolution on reform, General Assembly resolution 57/300. We agree with the idea that the United Nations regular budget for 2004-2005 should become the main practical instrument to bring United Nations activities in line with priority objectives. In

other words, the main financial document of the United Nations should effectively contribute to the reform process.

In the field of human rights, the main goal of transformation is to strengthen national systems of human rights protection and to promote closer interaction between Governments and United Nations bodies regarding implementation of core human rights treaties. Attention has been paid to activities to improve the system of special procedures and to enhance the degree of respective responsibilities. We recognize the fact that work in that direction has been conducted generally in a well-balanced and conscious manner, without attempting to sacrifice quantity at the expense of quality.

The section of the report on United Nations activities in the field of public information is focused on the main aspects of rationalizing United Nations information activities. Analysis of that section of the report shows that the transformations that had been initiated are essentially in line with the ideas and the comments considered during the most recent session of the Committee on Information, as well as with the recommendations outlined in the report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system: an agenda for further change" (*A/57/387*).

We continue to support the restructuring process of the Department of Public Information. We hope that the new operating model of the Department, launched in November 2002, will contribute to efficient and consistent implementation of earlier established strategic goals for reforming and improving the United Nations information branch. We consider as important the task set out by the Secretary-General to develop a system for assessing the performance of the new operating model of the Department. We await the results of the first annual programme impact review, which, as planned, is to be submitted for consideration by the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information in 2004.

We regard as appropriate the provision of the report regarding the consideration by the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly of the proposal to transfer the Cartographic Section from the Department of Public Information to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as had been repeatedly discussed and provisionally approved at Committee on Information meetings.

We support the process of rationalizing the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs, in keeping with General Assembly resolution 57/300. We believe it is important that the funds that are thus saved should be used to address important and priority tasks of the Department of Public Information.

We also continue to follow closely the efforts of the Department to improve and optimize United Nations libraries in the light of the specifics of their work at different duty stations. We support the establishment, in March 2003, of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, which is called upon to draft concrete recommendations with a view to increasing efficiency and accessibility of the United Nations library system. We await a detailed report on the implementation process of specific initiatives that are being worked out by the members of the Steering Committee during their quarterly meetings.

Regarding section III, on streamlining publications and reports, we appreciate the real improvements made in this area. Given the specifics of the Secretary-General's report on oceans and the law of the sea, which actually serves as a unique reference for all issues of cooperation among States in maritime affairs over the past year, we propose to maintain the practice of publishing this report above and beyond the limits established by the Secretariat for publishing this type of document.

As for strengthening the effectiveness of the United Nations presence in developing countries, it should be kept in mind that measures of United Nations operational agencies in this area, as reflected in the relevant chapter of the report, are regularly examined at the sessions of the Economic and Social Council and of the executive boards of relevant programmes and funds, such as the United Nations Development Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund, and approved by their resolutions and decisions. Agreed approaches of the Member States to these issues have been reflected particularly in the resolutions of the operative segment of the 2003 Economic and Social Council regular session.

It seems appropriate to continue the discussion on these topics within that type of format. Support should

be given to measures to simplify and agree on programming instruments aimed, inter alia, at reducing transaction costs for recipient countries, particularly the United Nations Development Assistance Framework results matrix, and streamlining tools for evaluation and reporting.

With respect to strengthening the resident coordinator system, greater participation of United Nations specialized and technical agencies in the functioning of this system is generally regarded by Member States as a step towards improvement. However, the task of balanced representation of United Nations organizations among the posts of resident coordinators should not become a goal in itself: the candidature of resident coordinators, beyond the purely professional requirements, in terms of involvement in a given United Nations system agency should be consistent with priority areas of cooperation with a given country and the United Nations.

With regard to strengthening the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, we support the establishment of the Financing for Development Office and the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination. With regard to the proposal to divide the main divisions of the Department into two clusters, each reporting to an Assistant Secretary-General, one focusing primarily on data analysis and information and the other on support for intergovernmental processes in the various policy areas, as well as in the context of meeting-related operational responsibilities, it is important to decide how the coordination and interaction of these clusters can be implemented. The intended strengthening of the Department could also be used to strengthen the potential of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

We welcome the establishment of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, and we look forward to the efficient work of that new entity. In the area of promoting partnerships, we support efforts aimed at expanding United Nations cooperation with the private sector, and particularly the establishment of a partnership office, which will comprise the Global Compact Office and the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships. We welcome cooperation between the office and the network of private-sector focal points throughout the United Nations system. We support the active promotion of partnership initiatives at the national, regional and international levels.

Nevertheless, we believe it essential that our main focus of attention be placed on practical implementation of the outcomes of the recent United Nations summits and conferences. The attainment of those goals is the principal objective for all partners — Governments, international organizations, business and non-governmental organizations — and it is also their common responsibility, especially given their extensive involvement in preparing for and holding such forums and in drafting their decisions. In that regard, we believe it important that non-governmental organizations have an opportunity to share their experience in participating in implementing the outcomes of those conferences and to properly evaluate their respective practical measures in that area. The United Nations Secretariat should envisage the most effective format possible for such a dialogue among civil society representatives.

With respect to United Nations administrative and budgetary reform, its focus will depend on Member States' decisions on a number of additional reports by the Secretariat regarding changes in the United Nations planning and budgeting process. For the time being, we should like to assess positively the improvements already made in the structure and format of the regular draft budgets and the draft budgets for peacekeeping operations. Any changes in United Nations personnel policy — inter alia, enhanced conditions of service or revised mechanisms to promote mobility — should, in our view, be in line with relevant General Assembly decisions in that area.

In conclusion, I should like to note that the Russian Federation is prepared to participate constructively and actively in consultations on this agenda item in order to reach agreed and balanced decisions.

Mr. Apata (Nigeria): I wish to express the delegation of Nigeria's appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his initiatives and efforts aimed at strengthening the United Nations. His efforts are consistent with the decisions and declarations of the Millennium Summit, at which our leaders pledged to make the United Nations a more effective institution for the promotion of world peace and sustainable development. We should also like to pay special tribute to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Fréchette, for her outstanding work on that issue during the fifty-seventh session.

Undoubtedly, significant progress has been made in the area of peace and security in the past five years. As a result, the United Nations is seen globally as an Organization dedicated to the maintenance of international peace and security, and Nigeria welcomes that. The reorganization and enhancement of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, following the consideration and review of the Brahimi report, has resulted in improvement in the capacity of the United Nations to deploy and manage complex peacekeeping and peace-building operations. In that regard, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, most recently, Liberia — where the United Nations effectively took over peacekeeping operations from the Economic Community of West African States — are success stories. We welcome and support the introduction of the rule of law, gender mainstreaming and a multidimensional approach to peacekeeping operations.

Given that the Millennium Development Goals emphasized the imperativeness of sustainable development through poverty eradication, the United Nations should rededicate its energies to addressing the problems of hunger, malnutrition and diseases, especially the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria and tuberculosis. Nigeria would like the United Nations and the rest of the international community to show the same commitment that they have demonstrated in the area of peace and security to promoting social and economic development. The targets we set for ourselves in the Millennium Declaration are very far-reaching. The year 2015 may seem far away. The reality is that, if we are to achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, we need to radically shift our focus and to commence the rapid implementation of the Goals and the outcomes of the Johannesburg and Monterrey summits. That is the great challenge facing the Organization today.

Since we cannot afford a United Nations with a majority of Members that are incapacitated by the staggering external debt crisis, the United Nations should explore avenues of resolving the crippling debt problem. We observe that, in 2002, the total debt of developing countries and countries with economies in transition increased by approximately $52 billion, while official capital flows to developing countries have witnessed a steady decline. It is estimated that in 2003, developing countries will spend $350 billion on their external debt burdens. In that regard, we cannot but agree with the Secretary-General's view that "reaching the Millennium Development Goals requires an increase in external financing from official sources, in addition to debt relief" (A/58/290, para. 41). We therefore urge that the problem of external debt be addressed with creativity, innovation, greater flexibility and a debt rescue strategy.

Another area where the United Nations can play — and indeed is already playing — a commendable role is in building strong partnerships. In that regard, we endorse the Secretary-General's recommendation to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities that would, among other things, examine the current challenges to peace and security, consider the contributions that collective action can make in addressing those challenges and review the functioning of the major organs of the United Nations and the relationships between them. We would consider the establishment of the panel to be yet another milestone in United Nations efforts to reach out to the wider society in search of solutions to strengthen the Organization.

Nigeria welcomes the partnerships between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, and non-State actors, such as civil society organizations, interest groups, universities and individuals. In that regard, we note with satisfaction that individual businesses as well as business organizations were given the opportunity to be formally accredited to the International Conference on Financing for Development and its Preparatory Committee, and that business representatives made policy proposals for discussion with Governments and international organizations. Exchanging policies and strategies with the organized private sector is appropriate, correct and consistent with the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. It should therefore be continued. Given these positive developments, Nigeria believes that the United Nations has positioned itself to monitor and follow up these partnerships.

We note that the 2004-2005 budget proposals reflected a number of measures aimed at strengthening the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, especially its management capacity. We welcome the proposals in the budget outlining the realignment of the entire Department in accordance with the new mandates arising from the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Action, taking into account the decision of the General

Assembly on the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of other major United Nations conferences and summits.

Although the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa was established last May, within the past six months it has made significant contributions to the promotion of the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We commend the quality of reports that the Office presented during the General Assembly debate on NEPAD, as well as its efforts at galvanizing the international community's support for NEPAD. We now need to provide adequate resources to enable the Office to meet the obligations of its mandate.

We commend you, Mr. President, for having initiated, very early in this session, the process of revitalizing the General Assembly. Nigeria commends the proposals in the non-paper that you submitted for the informal consultations of the General Assembly. We associate ourselves with the views expressed by the delegation of Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

It is important to acknowledge that, since the fifty-fifth session, we have taken important steps — albeit modest ones — in our collective efforts to revamp the General Assembly. In this connection, Nigeria wishes to pay special tribute to the Presidents of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth, fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh sessions and their facilitators for having deployed their best efforts on this very vital issue. Undoubtedly their contributions and efforts contributed immensely to the success achieved so far, particularly in the clustering of a number of agenda items and the election ahead of time of the president of the General Assembly and the principal officers of the Committees. We now need to focus on how to strengthen the Office of the President of the General Assembly and on the reform of our agenda.

Nigeria has always maintained that any Member State should be able to aspire to the highest office of this important organ. Yet it has been consistently manifest in the past 10 years that the holders of that office have had to deploy enormous resources from their capitals to assist them in discharging their responsibilities. The implication is that States that are not endowed with such resources will hesitate in offering the services of their nationals for this important assignment. In fact, it would be difficult for many Member States, particularly the least developed countries — many of which are from our continent — to offer a services of their nationals for this important office because of that constraint. Are we not by implication disenfranchising them? Are we also not preventing the General Assembly from being a bastion of democratic ideals in which both the powerful and the not-so-powerful have equal rights and aspirations?

It is therefore imperative for us to move rapidly at the current session towards adopting measures that would strengthen the Office of the President, such as by creating a number of staff positions for that Office. Such a decision will effectively remove the need for presidents of the General Assembly to bring senior officials from their capitals to assist them in the discharge of their important responsibilities. That would also enhance the institutional memory of the office.

With respect to the issue of the agenda of the General Assembly, Nigeria urges the president to hold regular and intensive discussions with the chairpersons of regional groups, as well as with Member States concerned, on how to resolve the problem. We should consider, for example, the establishment of special list of reserve items, without prejudice to the ability of Member States to bring up issues whenever they so desire. Another important way of strengthening the General Assembly would be to ensure that its decisions are implemented. Nigeria would like the Secretariat to be mandated to provide Member States, every four years, with a list of the Assembly's decisions and resolutions, and the level of their implementation. Such a measure would assist us in evaluating our performance — or, indeed, our non-performance.

On the reform and restructuring of the work of the Main Committees, Nigeria holds the view that no Committee should be singled out for reform, since the tasks of all the Committees are linked and interwoven. Consequently, the reform of the Main Committees should be carried out in a holistic manner.

In conclusion, Nigeria believes that the strengthening of the United Nations and the revitalization of the General Assembly should be seen as a work in progress. Nigeria reaffirms its support for efforts aimed at strengthening the entire United Nations, and assures the Secretary-General of our continued active participation in the process.

Mr. Mahiga (United Republic of Tanzania): My delegation joins others in acknowledging your ongoing spirited initiative, Mr. President, to advance the debate on revitalizing the General Assembly in the context of the overarching agenda of the reform of the United Nations. It is a timely and commendable initiative. My delegation fully associates itself with the statements on this subject made by the Permanent Representative of Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We attach great importance to the statements made by regional groups on this important subject of the reform of the United Nations and its organs. The views expressed in those statements are a synthesis of the views of the various groups of States and reflect the ongoing thinking and perceptions of the Member States in various regions of the world with regard to this Organization. This is a democratic method of representing States and providing inputs for the reform process and of collating and accommodating the diverse views of the shared vision of the 191 Members of this world body.

My country fully supports the efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations and is ready to provide maximum support for his endeavours. The debate on reforms has been going on for nearly a decade. It has gathered greater momentum in the past five years, generating a wealth of implementable ideas. In the meantime, new developments and trends have emerged in the international community as challenges to the United Nations that require an urgent response on the part of the Organization, which is the repository of the collective will of its entire membership.

The pace of the emerging global developments and challenges is overtaking the pace of the reform of the Organization and the capacity of this institution to adequately cope with the changes. Indeed, the reforms are long overdue and need to be effected sooner, rather than later, so as to enable existing institutions to remain relevant and focused on the challenges.

Globalization, new conventional and unconventional methods of warfare, global epidemics, the realization of the Millennium Declaration and other goals that we have set ourselves, are but a few of the array of challenges which demand prompt responses by the United Nations system and other multilateral organizations.

My delegation welcomes the initiative of the Secretary-General to establish a Panel Of Eminent Persons to make recommendations on the reform of the United Nations. We trust this will bring added value to existing proposals, some of which are already amenable to implementation and only require the galvanized political will of the Member States.

A key shortcoming in the revitalization of the General Assembly is the delay in implementation or non-implementation of its resolutions on revitalization that have already been adopted, as well as of other resolutions which the Assembly, as the policy-making body of the United Nations, has adopted in the course of its work. There is an urgent need holistically to link policy-making, decision-making and implementation, as stipulated in Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter on the mandate of the General Assembly. Equally important is the follow-up to conferences and meetings arising from resolutions of this Assembly, which ought to be centred on performance and results rather than on processes and proceedings on their reports. Such an approach would provide benchmarks for evaluating progress and expediting the effective implementation of General Assembly resolutions.

In this regard, we welcome your proposals, Sir, on enhancing the role of the President and the presidency, the creation of the Bureau of the Assembly and giving the General Committee that role. This will permit close follow-up to and evaluation of the implementation process, and strengthening and streamlining the working relationship between the Presidency and the Secretariat, as well as that between the General Assembly and other organs of the Organization, including the Security Council, as stipulated in the Charter.

It is important, therefore, that the revitalization of the General Assembly be accomplished simultaneously with reforms in the other organs of the Organization in order to coordinate and synchronize the overall reform process in a transparent manner. Of particular significance in enhancing the authority of the General Assembly is making better use of its decision-making power in budgetary matters, as elaborated in the statement of the Group of 77 and China. It is also equally essential that the relationship between and responsibilities of the other General Assembly Committees be reviewed to enable the Assembly to exercise its central role vis-à-vis the Committees in

order to streamline the coverage of related issues and agenda items, as deemed appropriate by the presidency.

Considerable effort has been made to rationalize the working methods of the General Assembly, such as documentation procedures, reorganization of agenda items, methodology of drafting and presenting resolutions, and time allocation for debates. However, rationalization should be seen as a prerequisite to revitalization of the Assembly, as well as an outcome of improvements in the methods of work arising from the revitalization of the General Assembly. As the revitalization task is accomplished, the needed working methods would be addressed accordingly. Reform has to be a continuous process. It may be necessary as an outcome of this exercise to establish a timetable for initiating reform and revitalization measures that are evidently feasible and could proceed after receiving the endorsement of Member States.

Finally, the General Assembly has the whole populace of this globe as its constituency. With rapid advances in information technology, more and more sectors of civil society in our respective countries are following what is being done at the United Nations to address issues of common concern and interest to them, such as peace, security and their overall socio-economic well-being as citizens of this world. The reforms of the United Nations should, in collaboration with States, also include the strengthening of outreach activities to the peoples of the world, not only to enhance its visibility, accountability and trust by the nations of the world at large, but above all to recognize the ownership of this multilateral body by we, the peoples of the United Nations.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, please allow me to express my appreciation to you, Sir, for holding this important meeting and for the informal note you issued not long ago. The note provides a good basis for our discussions. I also wish to thank Deputy Secretary-General Fréchette for her statement.

The Chinese delegation believes that the United Nations should keep pace with the times and reinforce the reform process so as to meet the needs of the new circumstances. We are pleased to note that the General Assembly has made reform one of its top priorities at this session and we highly commend the active role of President Hunte in that regard. We also commend the initiative of Secretary-General to establish the Panel Of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society. I wish to emphasize the following points on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

According to the Charter, the General Assembly is one of the most important organs of the Organization. It is the main venue at which all Member States may review and make decisions on such major issues as the maintenance of peace and security, the promotion of economic and social development and the strengthening of the international legal system. Its importance, broad representation and authority are indisputable.

Currently, the United Nations is facing unprecedented challenges in all fields. Terrorist threats are increasing unabated, regional conflicts are incessant, development issues remain acute and environmental protection still constitutes an arduous task. Furthermore, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the spread of communicable diseases and other new problems also call for appropriate solutions. The international community ardently hopes to see a stronger role of the United Nations so that it can serve as an effective mechanism in coordinating national efforts and can better respond to new threats and challenges.

A revitalized General Assembly will help strengthen the determination of Member States to pursue multilateralism, which will in turn have a major and far-reaching impact on rebuilding the authority and credibility of the United Nations system as a whole. Discussions on this subject have been going on for 11 years, since the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and progress has been made in some areas. However, frankly speaking, it still falls far short of the aspirations and expectations of the vast number of Member States. The revitalization of the work of the General Assembly bears on the interests of each and every Member State and on the future role of the United Nations. All of us must therefore have a strong sense of urgency.

The Chinese delegation fully endorses President Hunte's proposal to focus our discussions on two broad areas: enhancing the authority and role of the General Assembly and improving its working methods. We look forward to early substantial progress that will instil greater vitality in the General Assembly and enable it to play a more effective role in maintaining peace and

promoting development. To that end, it is necessary fully to solicit the views of the Member States, especially the developing countries, and to start with easier issues in order to reach consensus.

With respect to strengthening the authority and role of the General Assembly, the Chinese delegation holds that the relationship between the General Assembly and other principal organs, including the Security Council, is not one of competition and exclusion. Instead, it is one of cooperation and complementarity. We are in favour of enhancing the interaction between the General Assembly and other principal organs such as the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

We embrace the idea of choosing a theme for each session of the General Assembly, on the basis of prior consultations among Member States, in order to make the general debate more focused. We are also in favour of launching a regular review of resolutions adopted and decisions made previously by the Assembly and of making necessary adjustments or deletions according to the outcome of the review.

We support making earnest efforts to strengthen the function of the Office of the President of the General Assembly in terms of both human and financial resources. We believe it is necessary to establish a contact mechanism between the previous, the incumbent and the succeeding presidents to ensure continuity and consistency in the work of the Assembly. We also hope that each newly elected president will draw up recommendations for work priorities as early as possible.

We deem it a positive suggestion that the Department of Public Information be authorized to prepare an annual plan of action for each session of the General Assembly. This should be approved and implemented at an early date, while, at the same time, avoiding redundancy and waste.

On improving the working methods of the General Assembly, Mr. President, you yourself, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and representatives of Member States have put forward many constructive suggestions. What we need now is speedy action.

First, it is necessary to rationalize and streamline the agenda of the General Assembly. Some items can be considered in clusters or biannually. It is also necessary to schedule the consideration of items in a more balanced manner; some items can be discussed after the September to December period.

Secondly, practical solutions need to be found with respect to the overflow of documents. On the one hand, Member States should try not to request reports from the Secretary-General on every single issue, and on the other, the Secretariat should improve the quality of the reports with more focused analyses and more operable recommendations. The length of reports should also be drastically reduced and we request the Secretariat to work out some effective measures in that regard.

Thirdly, it is necessary to cluster the agenda items of the General Assembly and the Main Committees to define their focus and avoid repeated deliberation. There should be strengthened coordination in this regard among the president of the General Assembly, the chairs of the Main Committees and the representatives of the Secretary-General.

Fourthly, it is necessary to reinforce the function and mandate of the General Committee for a more effective operation of the General Assembly and the Main Committees. We recommend that the General Committee, taking into account the present situation and the wishes of most Member States, adopt specific measures to improve the procedures for submitting and finalizing agenda items, thus saving time and energy for both the Member States and the Secretariat.

Finally, it is necessary to proceed from actual needs and take the initiative to enhance exchanges with other institutions and civil society in various related areas so as to make good use of their resources.

All Member States have great expectations regarding the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, and President Hunte has demonstrated outstanding talents of leadership. We are now at a most opportune moment for making tangible progress. An ancient Chinese saying declares that "The sails on the boat are all set, all we need now is the right wind." We are confident that as long as the Member States can be guided by common interests, show strong political will and promote the reform process in a spirit of innovation and inclusion, the revitalization effort will soon bear fruit. Let us all join hands to this end.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): Today we consider a cluster of items dealing with the restructuring and reform of the United Nations and the

revitalization of the General Assembly, which are highly important in the context of the current global environment.

In his reports, the Secretary-General has consistently pointed out that, in order to make our Organization more effective, efficient and dedicated to working for the benefit of the peoples of the world, we must be well prepared to change with the times, constantly adjusting to new realities and new challenges. The need for a strong multilateral institution has never been more acutely felt than in this year that has been characterized by continuing globalization.

We fully support the initiative of the Secretary-General concerning the establishment of a high-level panel to review the functioning of the United Nations system. As other delegations, we do believe, however, that the work of revitalization and reform should be continued next year without waiting for the panel's recommendations.

It is imperative to strengthen the role of the United Nations in the social and economic areas. In our view, reforms should help the United Nations energize international cooperation in the follow-up to the outcomes of the major international conferences and summits held under its auspices. We believe that an implementation review process should be used to reaffirm the goals and objectives agreed upon at conferences and summits and to identify obstacles and constraints as well as actions and initiatives to overcome these.

In this context, a major event in 2005 to review the progress achieved in implementing all the commitments made in the Millennium Declaration, as referred to by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/270 B, would hopefully contribute to that process.

In our view, coordination between the United Nations and regional organizations should be reinvigorated. In this context, Kazakhstan proposes establishing a permanent council of regional organizations under the authority of United Nations Secretary-General. We believe that in order to make our Organization stronger, we should tune up the intergovernmental machinery and improve the methods of work of, most notably, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. The revitalization of the agendas of these bodies, coupled with better working methods, would be an essential step towards turning the United Nations as a whole into a more efficient tool.

My delegation welcomes the initiative of the President of the General Assembly concerning the provision of a framework for the revitalization of the Assembly, which is the heart of the reform of our Organization. We must direct our attention to the consideration of measures to improve its working methods because we do need an Assembly that is a more efficient, more focused and more relevant body. The first step in this direction, according to our vision, is the strengthening of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, whose role in the whole exercise is indispensable. We believe that these specific steps would enhance the role of the Assembly and increase its efficiency and effectiveness.

My delegation recognizes that some progress has been made in streamlining the agenda of the Assembly. We need to optimize it still further because some items do not require consideration on an annual basis. Also, items on which discussion has been deferred for a number of years must be deleted altogether.

We believe that debates in the plenary and in the Main Committees could be more interactive if they focused on a limited number of key issues of common interest. We must also make practical improvements with respect to resolutions. They could be shorter, more focused and meaningful. Their implementation must be monitored in an effective way.

The open-ended informal consultations on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, convened by the President, have provided an opportunity to have an extensive exchange of views and have laid the ground for the present plenary meeting. We agree with the proposal to hold informal consultations, breaking down the issues into two broad subjects — enhancing the authority and role of the General Assembly and improving its working methods.

As for the Security Council, it is obvious that the conditions that determined its composition and procedures have changed dramatically. Kazakhstan supports the proposal to convene a high-level meeting regarding the reform of that principal body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Another main United Nations body, the Economic and Social Council, must be more effective in the area of coordinating the activities of the United Nations

specialized agencies. In this regard, it is essential to devise clear guidelines with respect to the reform of the Economic and Social Council.

The Economic and Social Council could also be more effective in strengthening cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions in order to give them an additional impetus. It is time to combine, in practical terms, the efforts of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other leading economic and financial organizations to address poverty and social development.

Introducing a second set of United Nations reforms at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General proposed a comprehensive review of our programme of work, devoting our attention to the priorities established in the Millennium Declaration. We commend the Secretary-General for paying close attention to resource allocation. His proposal to cut the medium-term plan to two years would enable review bodies to take a more strategic approach to the work of the Organization and its resources. We approach the budgetary reform process in a positive manner and my delegation is ready to work with other delegations in order to make sure that far-reaching decisions are adopted at the current session.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to the United Nations reform process with a view to ensuring a safer and just world order. We fully share the Secretary-General's sense of urgency when it comes to structural changes within the United Nations. The United Nations can be strong if all Member States give their full support to the Secretary-General's reform initiatives. Kazakhstan stands ready to contribute to making the Organization more responsive to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): Let me begin by offering you my congratulations on organizing this joint debate. It is clear from the speeches we have heard so far that there is new energy regarding this issue and I think you, Sir, have done more than anyone else to revive a subject that has been drifting around the United Nations.

I want to mention in particular the speeches by Algeria and Morocco on behalf of Non-Aligned Movement and Group of 77. I thought there were also significant statements made by the delegations of Japan and the United States. I want to thank my colleague from Japan for referring to the four criteria we had mentioned; we appreciate that.

But I want to mention in particular the statement made by the United States delegation in which it spoke of seven principles that should guide our reform work. And indeed, if I may say something at the very outset to illustrate the problem that we face, we have a new statement and new principles. It is in the nature of this room that we do not talk to each other and do not refer to each other's statements and that indicates the problem that we have. But the reason why we wanted to highlight the principles mentioned by the United States — responsibility, accountability, effectiveness, stewardship of financial resources, modernization, credibility and freedom — is because we believe that these are useful principles to look at. We certainly support the principle of accountability, and if we can, indeed, in some way embed the principle of accountability into every dimension of the United Nations work, whether it is in the Secretariat, the Security Council, or the General Assembly, then I say half the problem is solved.

What I propose to do today, in the hope of making a helpful contribution, is to make four points. The first point poses the question of whether the non-revitalized General Assembly — I am not quite sure how you describe a non-revitalized General Assembly, perhaps a stagnant or a floundering General Assembly — is the problem, or a symptom of a larger problem? The second point asks: what are the real root causes, to use a favourite United Nations word, of a floundering General Assembly? The third point asks: what are the real solutions for revitalizing the General Assembly? And finally, I will try to mention a few points of detail that have come up in the debate so far.

The first point: is it the General Assembly that is lost or the United Nations as an Organization that is lost? I would like to suggest that we should consider the possibility that perhaps it is the Organization as a whole, and not just the General Assembly, that is lost.

The best way of illustrating this situation is to ask ourselves what a visitor from another planet, from, say, Mars, would see if he visited planet Earth for the first time. If he went around the globe, he would see a very dynamic globe where change is taking place every day, even as we speak. We live indeed in one of the most interesting moments in history. But if this visitor from

Mars asked to be taken to the centre of global issues and was brought into this room and was told "this is the centre of global issues," he would be quite puzzled with, on the one hand, the dynamism of the world out there and, on the other, the sleepiness of this room in here. This in some ways indicates that the Organization as whole may be part of the problem.

Of course, to be fair, some parts of this Organization are working, such as the peacekeeping operations or the norm creation exercises. There is much valuable work being done by the Organization. But if you look at it objectively as an Organization created in 1945, and you ask yourself whether this Organization has adapted to the year 2003, the simple and honest answer is that it has not, and that may be part of the root cause of the problem that we face.

This is why we support the Secretary-General's proposals to set up an group of eminent persons, because we believe the time has come to take a comprehensive look at the Organization as a whole and to figure out how we can make sure that it survives the twenty-first century.

In the spirit of referring to other points made in the debate, I want to say here that I thought our colleague from Bangladesh made an important point when he said that the selection of the eminent person's group is important. I hope that it will not be based just on eminence, but also on ability to contribute meaningfully to the discussion.

Second point: what are the root causes of the lack of vitality of this General Assembly? When I was a facilitator, we focused on several procedure issues, such as electing the President earlier — and I am glad we succeeded in doing this — trimming the agenda and clustering items. But it is quite clear that from the discussions that we have had, including the informal discussions you hosted, Mr. President, that perhaps larger issues, and not purely procedure issues, are at stake when it comes to revitalizing the General Assembly. Let me just mention one example. In the informal consultations that we had, one distinguished ambassador said, if I remember his words correctly, that the fundamental problem is that the Security Council is sucking the oxygen away from the General Assembly. I would say that that is a fair description of what has happened in this House. But the question is, why has this happened? Why has the Security Council successfully sucked oxygen from the General Assembly?

Here, unfortunately, I have to bring up a word that is rarely used in this Hall but perhaps should be used more often, and this word, of course, is geopolitics. When I served here in the 1980s, the reason why this Hall was full and why everyone would come and listen to the debates is that the cold war was on. Two super-Powers were competing for influence in this room, and everyone was engaged.

Now the cold war has ended, the geopolitical situation has changed, and the Security Council has achieved its primacy. So in some ways the lack of vibrancy in this room is due not only to our actions inside it but also to the larger global forces that also flow through this Hall. We have to address the larger dimension.

Here I want to quote from a report which I hope will be read carefully in the context of the debate on revitalization — I am referring, of course, to the report (A/57/836) that was circulated by the Dutch Permanent Representative at our meeting at the Greentree Estate on 16 and 17 May 2003.

Regarding the challenges faced by the General Assembly, the report states:

> "The General Assembly faces two primary challenges that threaten its — and the United Nations — credibility and legitimacy as global arbiter and decision maker. The first, policy-level, challenge is the chronic, and increasingly acute, gap between issues of global import and relevance and the way they are addressed by the General Assembly. Since the early 1990s, it has been increasingly hamstrung by the inability of member States to situate the Assembly in the post-cold-war era." *(A/47/836, p. 3)*

I mention this because I think that we need to do a larger analysis if we are to figure out the root causes of why we have to revitalize the General Assembly.

Let me now turn to my third point, about the solutions. I want to make a very important and fundamental point. If we are looking for the real solutions to revitalize the General Assembly, we can do so only if we first have among ourselves — all 191 Member States — a clear common understanding of what the causes are of the situation that we are in

today. If we do not agree on the causes, we will not be able to find the solutions.

In my case, flowing from the remarks I made earlier about the root cause, I should like to suggest four possible elements for solutions.

The first element, as I said, is that, if geopolitics is the problem, then geopolitics has to be made part of the solution. Here, clearly, we in the General Assembly have to engage the major Powers of the day and make them feel that the General Assembly is an important instrument that should be strengthened rather than weakened.

Here, hopefully, I have one iittle bit of good news. As a result of globalization, we all are now sailing in the same boat. Now that we are sailing in the same boat, I think that the great Powers are also beginning to realize that if one just takes care of one's own cabin on the boat, one has not taken care of one's problems, because there are problems on the rest of the boat, and the problems in the other cabins are coming into one's own cabin.

There is now a new awareness among the major Powers that they have to, in a sense, find new solutions to the global problems of the day, and, if indeed that is the new attitude, then the General Assembly can play a major role for the major Powers of the day.

With respect to the second possible solution, I think that the time has come for the General Assembly to move away from a mechanical process of going through its agenda every year from September to December without asking itself, is this the real agenda that the world is focusing on?

Here let me just give me a simple example. On 2 September 2003, in document A/58/323, Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the dire situation of the United Nations. He noted, in paragraph 6, that "The very relevance of current multilateral rules and institutions has come into question". He further stated, in paragraph 13, that:

> "The United Nations finds itself at a critical juncture: unless the Security Council regains the confidence of States and of world public opinion, individual States will increasingly resort exclusively to their own national perceptions of emerging threats and to their own judgement on how best to address them."

These very strong statements were made by the Secretary-General in September this year. But if a survey were to be done of all the speeches and remarks made in this Hall since that day, one would find that very few of them refer to the issues of the day, and one would ask oneself, "Why has this happened?".

Clearly, we must in this Hall address real issues and not issues that have come up mechanically.

Thirdly, I would suggest that we need to change the corporate culture of this Hall, of the Committees and, indeed, of the whole House. Whenever we meet, we should stop delivering speeches in this Hall and should start talking to each other, referring to each other's speeches, and commenting on what other representatives say, in the hope of developing an understanding. I believe and hope that this can be done.

Fourthly, I also believe, as I mentioned in informal consultations, that each one of us must make a calculation of how we balance our national interests and our collective interests. What I said in informal consultations was that if our real goal is to promote the collective interests of humankind as a whole, then this means that each one of us will have to sacrifice a little bit of our national interests if we are to promote the collective interest. As I said, the collective interest is a collection of national interests minus X.

Again, I will give a simple example. The agenda of the General Assembly is creaking under — some say drowning in — the huge load of agenda items and resolutions that come up repetitively. But every time it is suggested that an agenda item be removed, or the non-repetition of a resolution, one country will say that it has a very important interest in that particular resolution.

If each one of us adds to the burden of the General Assembly and none of us lightens it, how can we revitalize the Assembly?

My final point — and these are points of detail on several issues that have been raised — is on the presidency. We need strong leadership from a strong President, and you, Sir, frankly, have provided it very well. I say that, I hope, objectively, because you are the first President to do a report on the debate on the report of the Security Council. Even though we had taken a decision several years ago to prepare such a report, no other President did it. This shows the difference that a good President can make.

While we are focused on important issues such as electing the President early, providing more resources to the President's Office — and these all are important issues — I hope that we will also sensitively and delicately address the core issue, which is the selection of the President of the General Assembly. We must find a way to ensure that this post is not seen — as, unfortunately, some countries view it — as a way of, in a sense, planting someone in a retirement post. This post should be seen as an important and dynamic post in which work is done. The principle of meritocracy, I hope, will applied to the selection of the President.

The second major theme that has come up so far is on the question of the budget, and here the usual North-South tensions have emerged. These tensions are, in some ways, inevitable. They are inevitable because, on the one hand, the major contributors feel that they should have more of a say in deciding how the United Nations spends its money, which seems like a very reasonable demand. But if you accept that principle, then you undermine the principle of sovereign equality on which the United Nations was founded. And if you undermine the principle of sovereign equality, you take away a major pillar of the United Nations. That is one dimension of the problem.

The other part of the problem is that, if you allow the countries that contribute very little to decide how much to spend, then effectively you are allowing the smallest countries to impose taxes on the bigger countries. You can do that for a while, but after a while they will stop. So what we need on all discussions of the budget — and this is not a financial question; this is a political question — is a new political compact between the major contributors and the other countries, which are the major stakeholders of the United Nations. We think it can be done and that it has to be done.

I would like to end on an optimistic rather than a pessimistic note, and my optimistic note is this. This Hall, even when it is quiet and empty and when it sometimes seems almost devoid of activity, controls one of the world's most valuable and precious resources. That resource is legitimacy. Indeed, if you want to legitimize any global action, only the Members seated in this Hall can do it. Frankly speaking, even the legitimacy that the Security Council enjoys is an offshoot of the legitimacy of the General Assembly, because if the General Assembly goes, then the Security Council will also go, because it cannot survive on its own. Its legitimacy comes from the fact that 191 Member States have ratified the Charter and have thus agreed to abide by its provisions. We believe that this legitimacy is a valuable commodity that can be harnessed and used to promote many good global causes; and if we, the Members in this Hall, find ways and means of harnessing this legitimacy, then I think we will truly revive the General Assembly.

Mr. Kirn (Slovenia): It is not difficult to agree with what the preceding speaker, Mr. Mahbubani, has just shared with us in his traditional manner of addressing this audience with very original and thought-provoking ideas. I myself also intend to raise three issues that deal not so much with concrete suggestions and substance — to which I will refer later — because I believe that we have an excellent paper before us. I would like briefly to raise some general issues to reflect what I suspect is a common concern expressed during our meetings yesterday and today.

Let me start by emphasizing that Slovenia fully associates itself with the statement made yesterday by Italy on behalf of the European Union and the acceding countries. In my national capacity and as a Vice-President of the General Assembly, I wish to address the issue of the revitalization of the General Assembly in the context of broader United Nations reform.

My delegation shares the view that there is momentum for change and that we have to seize the opportunity. That is what I wish to talk about, sharing some thoughts with members. To my mind, at least three factors support the view that there is momentum for change.

First, a great majority of speakers, including heads of State or Government and foreign ministers, raised the need for United Nations reform during the general debate. A great many expressed political will in favour of United Nations reform. We see such views as representing the broad consensus among our leaders that emerged during the general debate. We now need to build on that consensus in our further deliberations, among ourselves and among different regional groups.

Secondly, as the President of Slovenia stated in his speech in the general debate (see A/58/PV.13), a number of good ideas and proposals relating to the revitalization and reform of the General Assembly have already been identified and have the support of the majority. Now we have to put them into practice.

The informal note on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly that you, Mr. President, have shared with us is an excellent starting point for a work plan on which I hope that we shall agree very soon. Your informal note was well received and supported during the open-ended informal consultations held on 17 October 2003, as well as during the General Assembly debate of yesterday and today.

On that basis, we believe that we can already move towards decision-making at the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, as was also stated by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union. In doing that, my delegation believes that we should keep everybody on board; we should be aware that everybody's view and contribution is extremely valuable and important.

May I add that, given the wide range of issues related to this process, our work should be organized on two tracks simultaneously: the first track, to deal with proposals and solutions related to improving the work of the General Assembly that are achievable and implementable over the short run; and the second track, to deal with proposals and solutions of a more structural nature, which may take more of our time and our patience. This work should complement the work of the panel of eminent personalities being established on the initiative of the Secretary-General.

Finally, to make this happen, we need leadership, and leadership is what we have: with the Secretary-General and his clear vision and his call for change; and with you, Mr. President, with your dedication and commitment and your stewardship of this transparent and inclusive process. Leadership and support are also needed on the part of all Permanent Representatives and their delegations to maintain the momentum of change and to bring about the tangible results we all desire.

Slovenia supports you, Mr. President, in your guidance and leadership, and we shall work with you closely.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia strongly advocates the reform of the our Organization, especially with regard to the enlargement of the Security Council and the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Along those lines, we express our firm support for the ongoing efforts to enhance the authority of the General Assembly and to improve its working methods.

Croatia is of the opinion that the essential step towards that paramount goal would be to replace the approach oriented towards long debates with one that will produce tangible results. Against that background, I should like to emphasize the main points of Croatia's position on the subject of General Assembly reform. The General Assembly is the only principal United Nations organ in which every Member State has an equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. That well known but too often overlooked fact must be a main guiding principle of our work. Consequently, the working groups and panels charged with producing proposals for comprehensive reform should be composed in a way that reflects appropriate regional and subregional representation.

The collective interest of the Organization must prevail over attempts to safeguard national interests at any cost — and to the detriment of the efficiency and the quality of work of the General Assembly. Reform must benefit all Member States, especially those that lack the privilege of Security Council membership. No single national interest — regardless of the size of the Member State — should be allowed to derail reform.

The political authority of the General Assembly should be significantly strengthened, particularly as far as implementation of its resolutions is concerned. The role of sponsors — as well as their responsibility for actions stemming from a particular resolution — could be enhanced in that regard. Adopting resolutions that we are not prepared or able to implement will lead to the utter irrelevance of the General Assembly. Therefore, we must find a way to reverse the current practice, even if that requires amending the Charter.

We need not only shorter and more substance-oriented resolutions, but also concise statements and debates. In that regard, the idea of placing a time limit on statements — depending on the issue being debated — comes to mind, especially in cases in which a Member State has already aligned itself with a statement made on behalf of a particular organization or regional grouping.

Making the General Assembly agenda smaller in terms of the number of agenda items and clustering items along thematic lines would not mean that certain issues would lose their substance or merit. On the contrary, we must avoid the endless repetition of

certain resolutions year after year. In streamlining the agenda, we must respect the legitimate interests of Member States, particularly bearing in mind that many of them have no leverage on the work of the Security Council, and that the General Assembly therefore remains the principal body for the promotion of their goals.

In exploring ways to revitalize the work of the General Assembly, no stone should be left unturned, including the utilization of modern technologies. Word processing and other related technologies should not be misused for the proliferation of documents and paperwork, but should be synergized to make our work much simpler and more efficient.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that the project of revitalization of the General Assembly is as much a technical as it is a political exercise. It will require all our expertise, flexibility, pragmatism and understanding. Croatia stands ready to actively participate along all those lines.

Finally, let me express my strong support for the statement made earlier by the Permanent Representative of Singapore.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.